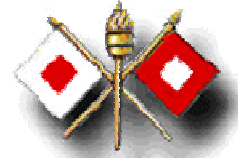


The Desert Voice



05 – 12 April 2004

Commander's Corner

TIKRIT, IRAQ & AO DANGER

– Now that our network is established and stable, a lot of great work has gone into improving the signal sites by hardening them with sandbags and providing shade for the shelters and generators. As we brace ourselves for the arrival of summer heat that will stress our systems, this protective measure will pay huge dividends. I continue to be amazed at the ingenuity of the American soldier. While there are numerous examples, I'd like to applaud SGT Hammond's F21 team and SPC Prager's F74 team for the outstanding work they've done on their site.

If you've made any attempt at all in staying abreast of events in Iraq, you know that this week there was an increase in enemy activity against coalition forces. Places like Fallujah, Ramadi, and Najaf dominated the headlines which are outside the 1st Infantry Division's footprint. Our area of operation, however, did see a definite spike in activity, and we have implemented additional safeguards in light of the increased threat. Body armor is worn at all times outdoors, and movements off the FOBs are limited to only those deemed mission essential. I even canceled a couple of my own, planned, movements to avoid exposing those who accompany me with any unnecessary risk.

In my comments last week, I shared with you some of the events



LTC Garrison and PFC Krulewicz at one of their convoy stops.

that happened. While, these comments were not meant to alarm or scare anyone, I believe you, who receive this newsletter, want to know what's happening, whether the news is good or bad. This is a combat zone and our soldiers are earning every cent of the additional financial entitlements they receive for working in this theater. So, I will continue to be candid with our readers about what's happening. I owe you that much because you all have loved ones here, you're all understandably concerned for their safety, and you need to hear the truth in lieu of the rumors. You should all be very proud of the sacrifice your soldiers are making for our nation.

This week's vignette is about the Signal Corps wig-wag. A Signal wig-wag is a crossed set of flags that symbolize the Signal Corps. One is red with a white center, and the other is white with a red center. To show pride in our branch we flew a set over the battalion headquarters. A few days later, we had a mortar attack



whereby four rounds landed within 100 meters of the SYSCON. Some were convinced that the "bad guys" were aiming at the flags, so they brought them down. Well...the XO would have none of that (the wig-wag flags are his)!

Within minutes he had the flags flying again, proudly over the "home" of our headquarters personnel. This, however, raised the flags even higher in the air. After yet another mortar attack (this time the rounds didn't land anywhere near us), the ADC(M), BG Morgan, showed up in the SYSCON. Being an artilleryman by trade, he educated me on how the mortars were being aimed at the signal flags waving atop our home. Well, suffice it to say, we're looking for a new place to display pride in our branch. What can I say? He's a General, and I know how to follow orders.

Thank you all for your thoughts and prayers, it does make a difference! Voice-6, Out.

Alpha Company

As you've probably seen on the news, this week has been eventful in terms of what the bad guys are up to. In spite of all that, we haven't had anyone hurt and we're all continuing on with our mission. We've been enjoying moderate temperatures and plenty of sunshine. Rest assured that while we're settling in, the soldier's have been able to stay busy.

SPC(P) Ryder was this week's Alpha Company hero. An

emergency medical evacuation (MEDEVAC) was needed for a soldier at FOB Brassfield. Unable to establish FM communications, someone got on the communications modem in the Line of Sight radio van at FOB Brassfield and passed the MEDEVAC message to SPC Ryder at FOB Remagen. SPC Ryder then called the MEDEVAC in on his FM ensuring the injured soldier was quickly transported to the medical facility. While this was an unconventional way to request a MEDEVAC, SPC Ryder's quick thinking and execution probably saved a life.

This week on Speicher we finally got to move into our permanent housing. We had been living in a large room, with cots lined up in a row with everyone's personal space consisting of what they could fit under their cot. Now the company is living in what are best described as trailer houses. Everyone now has their own room and can unpack those B-bags that they haven't been able to open due to lack of space.



PFC Bolen putting down flooring in his new room

We had several promotions this week. SSG Reese was promoted at FOB Caldwell, PFC Bond was promoted to his present rank at FOB Sumerall, and PFC Dickerson was promoted at FOB Dagger. At FOB Remagen, PFC Ballard and PFC Negrette were promoted to their present ranks. Also, here at beautiful FOB Speicher SPC Cecil,

SPC Mitchell and PV2 Cantrell were promoted to their present ranks. Overall, it was a busy but good week.



SPC Cecil, SPC Mitchell and PV2 Cantrell

Bravo Company

This week was the beginning of the Fighter Management Pass Program, the Change of Command Inventory, a promotion, and a heightened force protection program.

The Fighter Management Pass Program (FMPP) allows soldiers to leave the Area of Operations for five (5) days in Qatar. It is a program that 4ID started, and we are continuing in order to give our soldiers some rest and relaxation. SPC Dyer, PFC Dowdy, PFC Mitchell, and PFC Barron were the "brave souls" who were chosen to test the system. We hope to send a few soldiers each time the slots become available.



SGT Johnson poses with an Iraqi RPG on FOB Normandy

The Change of Command inventory has begun and is now in full swing. CPT Donley and I

started in FOB Danger, went to FOB Arrow, and then went to FOB Speicher. We are now finished in this area, and will pick up again once we get down to Anaconda and our normal area of operations.



The B8 "Team of the Day"
From Left to Right: a 4ID soldier, PV2 Kubilis, 1SG Johnson, PV2 Scherger, SGT Johnson

We had a promotion this week! PV2 Simpson (F33) is now PFC Simpson. He was given a "drive by promotion" the last time the convoy team was on FOB Gabe. Congratulations to him and his team. It was the first time I had to wake up a soldier to promote him!



Ok. I didn't take this picture. I don't know who did, but it is a cool shot
~CPT Dooley

As I'm sure the news has already covered, there was an increase in enemy activity this week. I can only tell everyone that our company (both B Co proper, and all of the attached teams in our area) is okay. What little damage that has occurred affected equipment only, which has already been fixed. The soldiers remain in good spirits and with perhaps slightly more respect for the

environment in which they are working. Have a great week!

Charlie Company

Greetings from CHARLIE ROCK! We enjoyed another exciting week in beautiful Iraq. This week we saw the temperature vary wildly from lows in the 40s to highs in the upper 90s. As soon as we began to complain about the cold it was time to start complaining about the heat again.

This week a number of soldiers from C Company were sent to a resort in the Middle East to enjoy 4 days of R&R. These passes were awarded for the hard work these soldiers had done on the deployment thus far and hopefully these four days will provide a much needed break for these soldiers to rest and relax. These soldiers who received the pass are: SPC Sukmanowsky, SGT Catron SPC Smith, Nick, and SGT Sanchez.

We also had the fortune to frock our first sergeant, SFC Brown, to the rank of 1SG. We would all like to congratulate him on his selection to E-8 and thank him for the outstanding job he is doing as the C Company 1SG.



LTC Garrison and CSM Butler promoting SFC Brown to 1SG at SYSCON, FOB Danger

Many soldiers continue to work diligently in their duties supporting combat operations in Iraq. SPC Almirol and SPC Shiflett concluded their week long tasking

of frisking local national females as they enter our base to work. This is extremely important work that keeps all of us here safe.

I know that many of you are worried about the images you are seeing on TV regarding Iraq. Although things have been “heating up” in our sector I can state unequivocally that we are taking every precaution to ensure that your loved one is safe and secure. Your continued prayers will bolster our safety and your letters will continue to provide us with comfort and resolve.

CHARLIE ROCK!

HHC

Good Day to all back there in wonderful Green Germany. This last week HHC had a PT test down here. The weather of course cooperated with a wonderful cold snap the felt like January in Germany. But, it was 50 degrees out with a 15MPH wind. Everybody performed well.

This week’s spot light is on G6. Yes, that is right, I went up to DMAIN and took pictures. Shhh...don’t tell anybody. Here is the automations help desk, SPC Mitchell and PFC Smith which believe it or not is why the division is able to work on computers. They may look idol but what you do not see is the stack of laptops they just received or finished working on.



SPC Mitchell and PFC Smith from G6Another helping a C Company soldier at Division on FOB Danger

Another very important section to the entire Division is our ISSO section. They handle all of the official mail for the Division. Here is SPC Sanders at here desk working on distribution before I interrupted her.



SPC Sanders at work in the Division Palace on FOB Danger

The next picture here is our Spectrum Management team. They are responsible for insuring that radio interference is kept to a minimum. This daily task is very hard and challenging.



Spectrum management team: SFC Holmes, SFC Bard and PFC Romas

Here is Maj. Jones taking a brief “time out” for picture. Maj. Jones is the G6 chief of Automations for the Division. He

insures the network is up, stable and functioning 24 hours a day.



MAJ Jones, G6 AMO, working in the Palace.

Lastly here is a picture at one of our retrans sites where we are conducting a live fire practice range to better round out our convoy skills. SPC Grinage here is firing the .50 Cal machine gun on top of HHC 6.



SPC Grinage firing at Midland

If you celebrate Easter we all wish you a Happy Easter and a good egg hunt. This is Tough 6 saying till next week.

Chaplain

The first time I tried to grow a garden, nothing went right. I only wanted a few rows of tomatoes and a couple rows of squash, so I broke out the shovel thinking, "I don't need no stinking plow." So, after two days, three shovel handles and four blisters, I had five beautiful rows of dirt ready to be planted. I went to work planting the seeds and using the Miracle Grow per the instructions on the back...one scoop in one gallon of water per week. Of course I watered the garden each day, but that first week, only used the fertilizer once.

While the sprouts came up after a few days, by the end of the first week (as I am prone to do), I became impatient...I wanted my tomatoes now, not later. So, the next week, I thought, "If one scoop in one gallon is good, then two scoops in two gallons must be better." Two days later I noticed the plants wilting a bit, so it crossed my mind that, "God really needed help with my garden." So, in typical form I just poured the Miracle Grow powder in between the rows and flooded the garden with water, knowing that all the nutrients would get to the roots and I'd have fresh, ripe tomatoes and squash in just a few days. As you can imagine, this didn't work very well. The mud turned green with algae, the leaves withered away, tomatoes that were about to turn red fell off, and I was left to wonder what in the world I had done wrong.

Two-plus months into this deployment, you may be finding your patience wearing thin and time simply not passing as fast as you'd like. If that's you, then my encouragement is simple; be patient and follow the instructions...follow the plan. Continue to trust and love your spouse. Continue to guard your hearts against temptation. Continue to care for your children. Continue to lean on one another. Continue to do something for yourself. Continue to persevere. But, above all, continue to wait upon the Lord.

A/115 SIG

Your soldiers have done many remarkable things since the last newsletter. They have continued to improve the quality of life in their respective areas with construction projects, and have worked hard to put sand bags

around for added protection around our work areas. They have conducted several patrols to different Forward Operating Bases (FOBs) in our sector to get supplies, soldiers and equipment to where they are needed. The soldiers have assisted soldiers on FOB Danger with resolving plumbing and electrical issues. They have worked in towers on guard duty, and shuttled Iraqi civilian officials to different places. All this has been accomplished while providing nearly flawless communications. The picture below is of SSG Marty Jones, SFC Charles Newton and SSG Gandy working on site improvement.



Company site on FOB Danger



Soldiers of A115 improving the site on FOB Danger

C/711 SIG

Node Center 14, Company C, 711th Signal Battalion Switch Supervisor, SFC David Freeman finds time out of his busy day to wash his laundry. SFC Freeman has been in the National Guard almost 30 years and is looking forward to retirement. He has a wife, Rhonda and son, Christopher waiting for him back home. He is a Project Engineer with Alltel Company when he is not

performing military duty. His technical skills and leadership attributes are a valuable asset to Node Center 14. He has built strong ties in his section and looks upon his soldiers as “family”. They are good at what they do and he is very proud to them!



SFC Freeman washing his clothes outside the soldier's palace on FOB Danger.

B/125 SIG

The past 30 days in our part of Iraq have been extremely productive and extremely busy. We are approaching our 90 day mark in the Atta Min Province. Task Force Bravo is still scattered about the entire area supporting the 2nd Brigade Combat Team of 25th Infantry Division. We are so good we are supporting additional units as well; 1st Infantry Division's Rear Operations Cell; 1-26 Infantry Battalion, and 2nd Brigade of 1st Infantry Division. It is a direct reflection on the skill of our soldiers and non-commissioned officers and the state of our equipment that we are able to conduct continuous operations across such a large area with no problems.



SFC Harbst the money man with \$15,000

We have experienced and accomplished so much since the last update that it will be difficult to summarize it all. To begin with I will highlight the negative events we have experienced to prevent rumors and get the facts out. Almost every camp we have soldiers on has experienced indirect and direct fire attacks. Kirkuk Air Base, on the edge of a city of close to a million people and home to most of the company and 2nd Brigade Combat Team, experiences the most attacks. The Brigade as a whole has suffered a few wounded, but the Signal Task Force has been fortunate and remained unharmed. This does not mean something may not happen to one of our soldiers at any time and I want everyone to prepare themselves for this possible event. Every day steps are taken to improve force protection at every camp we live and work on and all of our combat patrols are undertaken with force protection in mind.

Offensive combat operations have cost the Brigade the lives of two soldiers since our arrival in Iraq. One soldier was killed in a vehicle accident during a combat patrol and another was killed by a vehicle born improvised explosive device. We have always contacted the FRG as soon as anything happens involving a 25th Infantry Soldier and since we are a communications unit our response time to the FRG is often much faster than the Brigade HQ itself. If a soldier is wounded during operations or on any forward operating base, medical help is only minutes away. I stress this because I have personally watched our medical teams in action on many occasions and no faster medical treatment is possible.

On to more positive comments, we have installed and are maintaining communications from the Iranian Border to Tikrit and everywhere in between. No small feat and never allow our soldiers to understate what they are doing over here. Just days ago, we successfully installed what has been called the “Money Shot” or the “longest line of site radio link known to mankind.” This great feat was made possible by many people, but I would like to highlight newly promoted SGT Millikan, the newest team chief in Task Force Bravo. SGT Millikan is the team leader that conducted the first successful test shot and the site NCOIC in our current operation.

Other new changes: 1st Infantry Division has completely taken over for 4th Infantry Division. That doesn't mean a lot to the average soldier other than we all wear full body armor all of the time now. New commanders always want to do things differently!/? We are very safe walking around like turtles and do a good job of soaking our uniforms through with sweat. A positive note is that we have fully integrated into 1st Infantry Division's command and control network under the 121 Signal Battalion and created a robust support and communications network that tie the division and the brigade together into one composite team

We have conducted patrols to every part of our area and visited almost every site that our soldiers are living and working at. Every team is doing outstanding work and is truly what we describe as a force multiplier for the infantry units down range and here at the Brigade Operations Center. I really want to take some time and

highlight our remote small extension node SEN teams.

Our remote SEN teams live on base camps varying in size from 500-600 soldiers to as few as 50 soldiers. A quick rollup of all of our sites follows: G42(SSG Vankampen, Cruz, Davidson, Haun, Kelly, Williams) lives the best in what I would politely describe as an old folks home. SSG Vankampen is looking older with his new rank so I thought that description fit. I recently visited and promoted SSG Vankampen at his site and enjoyed a beer (non-alcoholic) and a cigar with him and his team. They may get upset with me for letting the cat out of the bag but they live in a very nice old house in what looks like a farm, albeit a farm guarded by Peshmerga mercenaries. They keep pets and have a small family of geese. Seriously, this team is located in a very remote portion of the country and is essentially isolated from the rest of the soldiers from Hawaii. They support operations to both keep the peace along the Iranian border, a main effort for all US Soldiers, and rebuild the economy and infrastructure of the town of As Sulayminah.

Other teams do not have it quite so well in terms of living conditions, but their missions still hold equal significance. G33(SGT Rickard, Mullins, Dunne, Herbert, Miller, Raley) supports 1-27 Infantry. This is the busiest sector in the Brigade with daily combat operations going on in a town near the forward operating base called Hawijah. At night the camp is blacked out and it is hard to walk anywhere without tripping and falling.

G73(SGT Hernandez, Berger, Cooper, Long, Martinez, Adams) has the most secure compound of

any that we as a collective company live on, living inside actual concrete bunkers and reinforced airplane hangers.. They support 1-14 Infantry (the best infantry battalion anywhere), a Alabama National Guard Cavalry unit and support combat and peace enforcement operations throughout the southern portion of our area. We have many other locations where our soldiers are located and I will highlight them in the next update in detail.

Mail has stabilized for most of Task Force Bravo. We do have challenges at two locations with Remote RAU teams and Relays. One team is inside our sector and we run mail to them on a regular basis. The other teams, RR63/Z63a (SGT Ragadio/SPC Donahee) are supporting 2nd Brigade of 1st Infantry Division and have been too far away for us to directly support. With all of the unit rotations in Iraq, mail has not been stable to this location. We are working to pull the team back into our area and to improve mail service in the meantime.

Finally, I must comment on the outstanding support we are receiving from the Family Readiness Group. Everyone as a whole has been very supportive and all reports indicate that there will be a very large turnout for the Easter Egg hunt at the Battalion Area. Tracy Langley, Emily Calhoun, Diane Wright, Tritia Ballard, and Maria Holloway have been working very hard to raise funds for the Task Force and deserve special praise. Rachelle Lemasters, our Family Readiness Group Leader, keeps us informed on all issues that families are having and we use her as a single point of contact to distribute facts on events that occur over here. One last point is the new Family

Readiness Help Desk at the battalion. The phone number is 808-653-0288.

SOLDIER SPOTLIGHT



Soldier Spotlight: SGT Brentley Knaus

Duty Position: Convoy Team Driver; B/125 SIG

FOB: Warrior

Home State: Ohio

Family: Married to wife, Mary Knaus with their three children

What he has to say about serving in Iraq: Being here and doing what we're doing can really be seen on the faces of the kids when we're out. They're always smiling and waving. And I enjoy being out on the road because we have the best convoy team around, with the best gunners in the battalion!!

Thanks!!



CPT Calhoun – Hero of the week. 121 SIG would like to send out a special thank you to CPT Silas Calhoun, who assisted our Division G6 and 121 SIG ALOC during one of his visits to FOB Danger. Due to his assistance we were able to provide faster secure internet traffic between the FOBs in Iraq. **Great Work CPT Calhoun!!**